DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 462 998 JC 020 212

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TITLE Action Concepts for Strengthening the Community College Organizational Structure.
PUB DATE 1996-00-00
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; College Administration; *Community Colleges; *Educational Policy; Feedback; *Organizational Effectiveness; *Organizational Objectives; Organizational Theories; Policy Analysis; Policy Formation; Power Structure; School Surveys; *Strategic Planning; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

This paper offers action concepts designed to be applied to achieve outcomes that benefit all college personnel in their attempts to fulfill their collective roles in strengthening the organizational structure of the college. NILIE (National Initiative for Leadership and Institutional Effectiveness) assesses the effectiveness of community college organizational structures by way of survey questions regarding college policies, feedback, work, commitment, and decision making. The Personal Assessment of the College Environment (PACE) is the survey most widely used in support of the NILIE mission. The paper presents the following action concepts, all of which are designed to strengthen the organizational structure of the college: (1) enacting policies that guide work toward achieving your college's mission and vision; (2) providing the appropriate feedback whenever possible; (3) designing work to satisfy employee needs while simultaneously improving your college's organizational effectiveness; (4) encouraging renewal of commitments to your students, your college or university, yourself, your colleagues, your tasks, and your profession; and (5) whenever possible, skillfully incorporating employees in the decision making to develop their skills. (Contains 11 references and 17 suggested readings.) (AUTH/NB)

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Action Concepts For Strengthening the Community College Organizational Structure

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Action Concepts For Strengthening the Community College Organizational Structure

By Daniel DeMarte, Ed.D.

Introduction

In 1990, George A. Baker III envisioned a consortium entitled the National Initiative for Leadership and Institutional Effectiveness (NILIE). The NILIE mission is twofold: to conduct research and disseminate information on strategies to link leadership to institutional effectiveness, and to improve student success through quality initiatives.

Institutional climate surveys were developed by Baker to support the NILIE mission. The Personal Assessment of the College Environment (PACE) is the most widely used survey. Other climate surveys include the Student Assessment of the College Environment (SACE), and the Cultural, Environmental, Structural and Technical Assessment (CESTA).

Over sixty community/technical colleges (number includes all of the community/technical colleges in two state systems) and two universities have administered a PACE since 1991. A NILIE researcher conducts the data analysis for each survey and develops an institutional report. The NILIE staff maintains a national database of composite averages for all surveys. The PACE consists of six domains: Formal Influence (leadership), Communication, Collaboration, Organizational Structure, Work Design, and Student Focus. Refer to Figure 1 for the NILIE National Database (PACE).

FIGURE 1.

NILIE Systems Analysis (i.e., collaborative, consultative, competitive, coercive) is adapted from Likert's Systems Analysis. Fifty-six percent (5,862) of the surveys administered (10,490) by those colleges and universities in the aforementioned database were returned to NILIE for analysis. The Communication (3.34), Collaboration (3.41), and Organizational Structure (3.47) domains have consistently scored the lowest. This concept paper is one of three that will focus on concepts for strengthening these areas. The Organizational Structure domain is the focus of this abstract.

The PACE

Fifty-five items comprise the PACE. The purpose of the PACE is to promote open and constructive communication and to establish priorities for change within the college by obtaining the perceptions of employees concerning the college environment. By design, the PACE compares the existing climate with an ideal climate from an individual and group perspective. Personnel from a college who are planning to administer a PACE collaborate with NILIE staff to design a survey that meets their specific needs.

The PACE results are prioritized for use in planning strategies to improve the existing climate. Results provide colleges an opportunity for renewal through self- analysis. College administrators, faculty, staff, and board members should benefit from this discussion on action concepts for strengthening college organizational structures.

Organizational Structure

Organizational structure refers to the extent to which activities of personnel are structured and decision-making authority is concentrated at the top (Pugh & Aston Group in Pugh & Hickson, 1989, p. 18). More specifically it is concerned with the continued activities directed towards the

achievement of stated objectives. The early writers on organizations studied various aspects of organizational structures. For example, Weber developed a typology of organizational structures (i.e., charismatic, traditional, rational-legal) based on the way in which authority is legitimized. Pugh and the Aston Group studied the dimensions of structures (i.e., specialization, standardization, formalization, centralization, configuration). Mintzberg classified managerial roles (i.e., interpersonal, information, decisional) relative to the structure of the organizations being managed (Pugh & Hickson, 1989).

These contributors and many others have recognized through their research that an appropriate structure is vital to the efficiency of an organization (Pugh & Hickson, 1989). Parilla describes (1993) the organizational structure most commonly used to manage growth in many community colleges as the controlled pyramid used by public school bureaucracies. NILIE studies elements (i.e., college policies, feedback, work, commitment, decision making) indicative of effective community college organizational structures.

The Organizational Structure Domain of the PACE

Transactional activities (e.g., task allocation, supervision, coordination) determine an organization's structure. Structure can be adapted to meet changing needs (Pugh & Hickson, 1989). Parilla (1993) describes an adaptive institution as, "one that knows a lot about itself through faculty and staff who are involved in identifying challenges and in creating programs to meet changing needs" (p. 21). As community colleges approach the twenty-first century, they continue to adapt their structures in response to steadfast growth or declining enrollments, increased internal and external accountability, and scarcer resources.

The following PACE survey statements (i.e., items) are used to assess perceptions of a college's effectiveness as it pertains to organizational structure. Refer to Table 1.

TABLE 1. PACE Organizational Structure Statements

• The extent to which college-wide policies guide my work
• The extent to which I receive timely and appropriate feedback
• The extent to which the variety and responsibility of my work is appropriate
• The extent to which my commitments at this college are encouraged
• The extent to which decisions are made at the appropriate level at this college

Action Concepts for Strengthening Community College Organizational Structures

An action concept is an idea that is applied in an effort to achieve an intended outcome. The five action concepts discussed below are written for the benefit of all college personnel towards fulfilling their collective roles (i.e., individual unit member and team member) to strengthen the organizational structure of their college.

Action Concept One: College Policies

- *Policies that advance a college's mission and vision will strengthen its organizational structure.*

Ideally, the college mission and vision is shared by all internal and external associates. In colleges where shared governance is the norm, internal committees and constituencies study policies and recommend changes to the board (Boggs, 1995). When policies are enacted in support a college's mission and vision, personnel are expected to implement and comply with those policies. The NILIE National Database (PACE) mean scores indicate that personnel are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with college policies.

Kerr and Gade (1989) make an important distinction between minor and major college policies. In some cases, the administration (i.e., the president) establishes minor policies - for example, detailed rules, regulations, and procedures. However, major college policies are established by the board. Examples include appointment and review of the president, the naming of buildings and professorial chairs, legal actions, collective bargaining, and large investments.

The makeup of a board may determine who establishes policy. Typically there are local or state boards whose members are either elected or appointed. College policies should guide the work of personnel towards fulfillment of a shared mission and vision regardless of who establishes them. (For additional information on "college policies" consult the suggested readings at the end of this abstract.)

Action Concept Two: Feedback

<LI>Obtaining an understanding and appreciation for feedback is a requisite in order to provide the appropriate feedback to strengthen a college's organizational structure with its use.

Without feedback, individuals do not have the benefit of information regarding their progress towards goals. College personnel employ feedback to measure performance. Feedback facilitates learning: affording the opportunity to compare actual results with intended results. Results reveal strengths and weaknesses that may require adjustments such as providing additional training or a change in leadership practices (Hampton, Summer & Webber, 1987). Sharing the results of a PACE survey with the college community is an excellent example of how feedback can be used to strengthen your college's organizational structure. The NILIE National Database (PACE) mean scores indicate that personnel are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with feedback.

Feedback is modeled after individual needs and personality. Hackman and Oldham (1980) found that the impact of feedback enhanced motivation and satisfaction for individuals with high

growth needs. Likewise, Matsui, Okada, and Kakuyama (1982) found that the impact of feedback enhanced performance for individuals with high achievement needs (cited in Hampton, Summer & Webber, 1987). Providing the appropriate feedback depends on the success of college personnel who attempt to learn each other's needs.

Locke and Latham (1984) identified cueing and summary as two kinds of feedback. Cueing feedback provides information on work methods and activities. Cueing alerts employees about problems or strengths that contribute to performance. Summary feedback provides information on performance towards objectives. Matsui, Okada, and Kakuyama (1982) found that summary feedback could be used to help employees continue strong performance and improve weak performance (cited in Hampton, Summer & Webber, 1987).

The effect of the feedback varies depending on its source, implications, and quality. Self-generated feedback is strongly associated with improved performance whereas external feedback (i.e., provided by a co-worker or supervisor) is biased (Hampton, Summer & Webber, 1987). Quality verbal and nonverbal feedback is objective and used to explain rather than blame. For this reason, explanatory feedback is most valuable in developing an individual's skills and abilities and should be provided whenever feasible. (For additional information on "feedback" consult the suggested readings at the end of this abstract.)

Action Concept Three: Work Satisfaction

- *Adapting the work to satisfy employee needs will strengthen the organizational structure of the college.*

Employees are motivated to work for various reasons. Some work to satisfy basic needs (e.g., food, shelter), others work to satisfy belonging needs (e.g., love, affection), and still others work to satisfy esteem needs (e.g., achievement, self- respect). As individual's mature new needs

emerge. Employers attempt to satisfy worker's as their needs change (Hampton, Summer, & Webber, 1987).

Employee job satisfaction and organizational effectiveness can be improved by work design. Work can be designed to increase the feelings of self-respect and responsibility by adding variety. Adding variety relieves boredom and nurtures a sense of personal meaningfulness, value, and importance by getting the worker more involved. Involvement at this level advances the employee one step beyond just doing the work. Work can also be designed to increase responsibility and trust by engaging the employee in the planning and control over the work and allowing him or her to set the work pace. This is accomplished by delegating control over decisions regarding methods and procedures used to get the work done (Hampton, Summer, & Webber, 1987; Porter, Lawler, & Hackman, 1975). The NILIE National Database (PACE) mean scores indicate that personnel are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their work. However, personnel are more satisfied with their work compared to college policies, feedback, commitment, and decision making.

An employee who is not suited to meet the demands of a position is more likely to experience stress (i.e., overall dissatisfaction, lack of commitment, poor performance) than an employee who is suited to meet those demands. In either case, there are a number of ways to alleviate stress. For example, assign work to the appropriate employee, provide adequate demands that challenge and maintain high morale, be reasonable with demands (i.e., do not overwork an employee), and avoid giving contradictory or conflicting demands (Hampton, Summer, & Webber, 1987). (For additional information on "work" consult the suggested readings at the end of this abstract.)

Action Concept Four: Commitment

- *Commitment is the lifeblood of the college. Encouraging all college personnel to renew their commitments will strengthen its organizational structure.*

In the case of colleges and universities commitment to the student as customer is foremost. College personnel convey their commitment to students through the services they provide. This requires all college personnel to encourage, listen to, and share student input. College personnel who appreciate students treat them with utmost importance, especially when helping students solve problems (Hersey & Blanchard, 1993).

Commitment to colleges and universities is expressed through positive regard, loyalty, and by communicating and modeling the college's values. College personnel demonstrate positive regard by constantly presenting the college in a positive light and by discouraging destructive comments. College personnel demonstrate loyalty to the senior management team through their behavior (especially through implementing decisions with energy and commitment). Loyalty is essential to the college's ability to achieve its mission. College personnel communicate the college's values through their actions (Hersey & Blanchard, 1993). Upholding the college's values is especially important during difficult times.

Commitment to self is achieved by demonstrating autonomy, projecting self- image, and accepting constructive criticism. Autonomy is demonstrated by taking responsibility and ownership for decisions, protecting personal beliefs, and always striving to achieve excellence when taking reasonable risk. Acting on a basis of total integrity projects a confident, self-assured image. Be careful not to overplay personal accomplishments. Listen to and encourage constructive criticism for personal improvement, admit mistakes, and avoid reacting adversely (Hersey & Blanchard, 1993).

Commitment to people means dedication to the team and individual members by showing positive concern, recognition, and encouraging innovation. Showing positive concern and recognition is accomplished by helping people to feel and act like winners, by rewarding and reinforcing excellent performance, and creating and maintaining a courteous and respectful environment. Innovation is encouraged by demonstrating interest in the ideas of administrators, faculty, staff, student, and board members; providing opportunities to test those ideas; and giving credit for their success. Commitment to people will instill an atmosphere of confidence, accomplishment, and trust (Hersey & Blanchard, 1993).

Commitment to the task involves understanding the importance and relevance of the task and ensuring its successful completion. Commitment to task is achieved by keeping the right focus, keeping it simple, being action-oriented, and building task importance. Keep the right focus on the task by concentrating everyone's attention on what is most important (i.e., the college mission and vision). Keep the tasks simple by breaking them down into achievable components while avoiding unnecessary complications and procedures. An action-oriented person is one who executes, maintains positive momentum, and accomplishes the task before the deadline. Play up the importance of the work to be done. Expect excellence in task achievement and continuous excellence will become the college hallmark (Hersey & Blanchard, 1993).

Lawless (1979) writes that commitment to the career or profession is also very important. Commitment to your career or profession is achieved through your desire to maintain high standards while at the same time expanding public recognition. Hampton, Summer, and Webber (1987) emphasize the importance of balancing commitment to the organization while maintaining a sense of independence. Rejecting college values and norms and pure conformity are at opposite ends of the continuum. Endeavor to accept your colleges values and norms while

looking for ways to have an individual impact. (For additional information on "commitment" consult the suggested readings at the end of this abstract.)

Action Concept Five: Decision Making

- *Skillfully incorporating others in the decisions making will strengthen the organizational structure of the college.*

The Vroom-Jago Normative Decision Model is excellent for guiding leaders to change the behavior of followers by appropriately involving them in the decision making. To an extent, leaders can change the climate and the culture of a college through decision making. Vroom-Jago (1988) revised the earlier Vroom-Yetton model to correct some of its weaknesses. Hoy and Tartar (1994) refer to the Vroom- Yetton model as the best-known management model of participation in organizations: no leadership model surpasses in validity or usefulness (Hoy & Tartar, 1994). The NILIE National Database (PACE) mean scores indicate that college personnel are dissatisfied with the level of decision making (mean scores are frequently lower than all others).

With the visual aid of a decision tree, the rules and operational questions in Table 2 will direct a leader to a decision that matches the level of participation to the nature of the situation and problem. There are five Vroom-Jago decision-making styles: Autocratic (A), Informed-Autocratic (IA), Individual-Consultative (IC), Group-Consultative (GC), and Group-Agreement (GA) (Hoy & Tartar, 1994).

Two constraints of the model include the time involved it takes to make a decision, and opportunity for employee development. The time it takes to make a decision is costly in terms of taking attention off of other tasks. Therefore, time should be minimized during decision making. Leaders can empower employees when they provide opportunities to practice and develop

decision making skills. Therefore, leaders should take advantage of these opportunities whenever possible (Hoy & Tartar, 1994).

Decision making can be problematic. Examples of the effects of flawed decision processes are described in the literature. College personnel can reduce the risks associated with faulty decision making processes by employing the Vroom-Jago Normative Decision Model. (For additional information on "decision making" consult the suggested readings at the end of this abstract.)

TABLE 2.

Rules to Enhance Quality	Rules to Enhance Acceptance
The Quality Rule - only use a lateral approach when (a) the quality requirement is low, the matter is unimportant to employees, or (b) the quality requirement is low, the decision is important and will be readily accepted by employees. Example Operational Questions: How important is the quality requirement of the decision? What is the difference between an unwise and a wise decision to the organization?	**The Acceptance Rule** - involve employees when acceptance of the decision is critical for effective implementation and when you are unsure of their acceptance of an autocratic decision. Denying their participation in decision making risks acceptance. Example Operational Questions: Is it likely that an autocratic decision will be accepted by employees? How likely is it that the superior will be able to sell his or her solution to employees?
The Leader Information Rule - do not	**The Conflict Rule** - involve employees

make a unilateral decision when the quality of a decision is important and you do not possess sufficient information and expertise to solve the problem alone, and risk a low quality decision. Example Operational Questions: Does the leader posses sufficient information to make a high-quality decision? Does the leader have the necessary expertise to solve the problem without employees?	when there is conflict, acceptance of the decision is critical, and an autocratic decision is unlikely to be accepted. Structure the situation and provide information so that employees can resolve their differences. Example Operational Questions: Is conflict likely among employees over preferred solutions? Is the decision problem controversial?
The Trust Rule - make a unilateral decision when the quality of the decision is important and you cannot trust employees to decide on the basis of the organizational goals. A lack of control over the decision may jeopardize its quality. Example Operational Questions: Do employees share organizational goals? Are solutions preferred by employees likely to violate organizational	**The Commitment Rule** - a group decision should be made even when the quality of the decision is not important, but its acceptance is critical and problematic. A group decision will likely generate more acceptance and commitment than a hierarchical one. Example Operational Questions: How important is employee commitment to the solution ? How important is the willingness of employees to make the

interests?	decision successful?
The Unstructured Problem Rule - involve knowledgeable employees to collect relevant information when the quality of the decision is important, the problem is unstructured, and you lack sufficient expertise or information. Example Operational Questions: Does the problem have a well-defined goal and set of alternatives? Does the problem have a standard set of solutions?	**The Subordinate Information Rule** - employees should not be called upon to make a decision for which they have insufficient information or expertise. Example Operational Questions: Do employees have the necessary expertise to solve the problem?

(Source: Hoy & Tartar, 1994, pp. 117-138)

Summary

An appropriate organizational structure is vital to the efficiency of colleges and universities. Various aspects of organizational structures have been studied by Weber, Pugh, Mintzberg, and others. (Please consult references and suggested readings that are listed at the end of this abstract.) NILIE assesses the effectiveness of community college organizational structures by way of survey questions regarding college policies, feedback, work, commitment, and decision making.

Five action concepts for strengthening your college's organizational structure have been discussed. The five action concepts include: (1) enacting policies that guide work towards achieving your college's mission and vision, (2) providing the appropriate feedback whenever

possible, (3) designing work to satisfy employee needs while simultaneously improving your college's organizational effectiveness, (4) encouraging renewal of commitments to your students, your college or university, your self, your colleagues, your tasks, and your profession, and (5) whenever possible, skillfully incorporate employees in the decision making to develop their skills.

Just as there are various aspects about organizational structures to be studied, there are various concepts that can strengthen those same structures. Five action concepts have been outlined in this abstract in an effort to assist administrators, faculty, staff, and board members to strengthen their organizational structures.

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In addition to the suggested readings listed above, there are numerous related documents housed in Educational Research Information Centers (ERIC) and other computer databases.

Biography

Daniel T. DeMarte is a former NILIE team member. He is employed at Macomb Community College and a doctoral student at North Carolina State University, Department of Adult and Community College Education.

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